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ABSTRACT

The sociology of leisure provides a rich and long-standing research tradition in deviant leisure activity. Leisure and recreation experiences are the product, not of a single system, but of the interaction among systems, none of which separately seems to effectively treat the family and its members. The need for recreational group activities is common to all youth; yet a lack of recreational alternatives results in negative pathological pursuits. In addition, negative leisure lifestyles of parents, such as smoking, drinking, drug use, and recreational sex, put children at risk. Recreation and war are inextricably linked. The idea that war is a game persists even today, in part because war is an outlet for man's inherent aggression. Technology has made physical activity less necessary in life, creating a physically unfit population. The prisons contain hundreds of thousands of individuals who lack any sense of recreational alternatives. Tentative evidence suggests that unemployed people tend to reduce the time spent on social activities outside of the home and increase their passive, solitary, home-based pursuits. The entertainment industry has not shown much discretion to its young audience in terms of nutrition, cigarette smoking, violence, or exercise. Children seem to have less support from schools, church, and home for their moral development. Recreational professionals must understand these social issues surrounding today's youth. (KS)

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Making the Connection Between Leisure and At-Risk Youth in Today's Society

James Calloway

The role of leisure in addressing the at risk youth problem in today's society has received minimal attention by students, educators and practitioners in the leisure profession; yet the discipline of sociology of leisure constitutes a rich and long-standing research tradition in deviant leisure activity. Accord to Chris Rojek, sociologist;

> The topic is intrinsically interesting and might stimulate more discussion than somewhat prosaic studies of leisure and its associated variables which choke most editions of the major journals of leisure and recreation research. More importantly the study of deviant leisure practice might throw some light on the most difficult of subjects - normal leisure relations.

There are many park and recreation professionals who would argue that recreation professionals who would argue that recreation is about fun - not misery, about opportunity - not oppression, about life - not death and destruction. Yet this is the opposing dichotomy that has resulted in our failure to gain the respect of related human service professional, i.e. the true measure of a professional is determined by how much damage it would do it its services were not rendered in an acceptable manner. Other professions know, and so does the public, that if services are denied or inappropriately administered, dire results can occur. The public has no idea as to what the negative results of failed leisure services would be.

As a profession we have not demonstrated successfully how valuable our contribution can be. The negative aspects of leisure must be explored if we are to determine our importance among the human service

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professionals and the public of the 21st century. Equally, the plight of our youth in today's society cannot wait for us to focus on our role with at risk youth. We must start now.

> No answers or solutions are attempted in this article. What I hope to accomplish is to offer you a different way of perceiving the problems of youth in today's society. Often times how we perceive a problem determines how we approach the problem. In my view the solutions to the at risk youth problem will be found when our perceptions of the causes are better understood and the adverse forces in our environment which impact on our youth are identified. Addressing symptoms is not the answer.

Making the Connection

Leisure and recreation experiences are not the product of a single system but the interaction between systems. It is within these systems that distance classes of behaviors are nourished, e.g. behaviors expected at a pep rally would not be expected at a church sermon. There are many health and welfare systems/programs in every community in this country to help at risk youth and their families: the county welfare agency, the county child protection agency, the juvenile court, the youth employment programs, the health and mental health programs, the child care and early childhood development agencies, private agencies funded by the United Way and other sources, the city recreation and parks department and dozens of programs within the public schools. However, the connections between these agencies is noticeable absent. First Director of Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE) concluded that:

> Tenacious collaboration alone will not make up for our societal under investment in children. The answer starts with recognition of the similarities and supportive structures of all systems involved in the habitation of families and their individual members.

There are numerous accounts of families serviced by nine or more different agencies, but none of the agencies take responsibility for helping the families. Separately they fail to treat the family and its individual members in an effective manner.

The Leisure Connection

Leisure is a form of activity that has many qualities in common with crime and delinquency. A Washington Post reporter wrote about the playground leader who reported children on his playground playing cops and drug dealers. One group of youth has small plastic packets of sugar simulating real drugs used on the streets. The rules of the game were for the youth to conceal the packets and get them to their friends who were hiding in another part of the park. Similarly stealing apples from a fruit stand or driving a stolen car can satisfy some of the basic needs of desires conventionally satisfied by such recreational pursuits as camping, athletics or the creative arts.

The need for recreational group activities is common to all youth; yet delinquent youth characteristically lack recreational skills, interest and motivation toward socially acceptable group activity. Exposure to acceptable play-group activities is essential at early age if youngsters are to seek appropriate group activities in their teens. By age 12, youth's values are soundly integrated into their attitudes and behaviors.

A lack of recreational alternatives results in negative pathological pursuits. We must clearly articulate to our youth appropriate choices within the context of their environments and the extent to which participation can be useful or abusive to them.

At Risk Youth

At risk youth have been defined as adolescents in potential trouble at school or home, involved with drug or alcohol but who have not been involved with the juvenile justice system. A second population of at risk youth is that group of young people who have already entered the juvenile system and have been in a confined residential setting. These descriptions don't go far enough. A child's environment must be considered as part of the overall scenario for potential at risk indicators.

A mother living a negative leisure lifestyle subjects the unborn fetus to potential at risk factors. Infant mortality per 1000 in the United States is the highest in the world. Many problems which occur at birth are a direct result of negative leisure lifestyles on the part of the adult parent. Fetal alcohol exposure, excessive cigarette smoking, cocaine and other

chemicals engaged in during pregnancy, in all likelihood will result in a baby born at risk. AIDS is another risk factor. When viewed within in the context of leisure, recreational sex, often spontaneous and unprotected, puts a baby at risk.

Poverty puts children at risk. Kids under five suffer more poverty than any age group in America. It is the number one contributor to ill health. Usually the poor are void of leisure opportunities. Quality of life is determined by one's leisure, and the absence of leisure results in the absence of living. Yet clearly, the government has not taken responsibility for promoting the importance of recreation in its citizens' lives. The President's Commission on American Outdoors (PCAO) was a point of light snuffed out by the Reagan and Bush administrations.

Other conditions may cause at risk conditions for youth. Entering kindergarten without adequate preparations and sensitive teachers can be a traumatic experience for children, resulting in long term trauma and potential at risk behavior. One school principal noted that schools contribute to 50 percent of the at risk youth problem in this country. Dating partners, foster care, child abuse, low self-esteem, children who own themselves (latch key) and parents who divorce their children (which is legal in 13 states and pending in many more) are all factors contributing to the at risk youth problem.

Government

Government around the world recognize the value of leisure in society. Our government must, therefore, share in the responsibility of making appropriate leisure activities available to ALL youth. By all vital measures, American children remain the most neglected in the developed world. Their health and welfare simply "not high on the agenda of this country", states Dr. Reed Tucson, former Washington D.C. Health Commissioner. Drastic cutbacks in educational funding are but one illustration of this point.

War and Recreation

Recreation and war are inextricably linked. Mark Maters, in his thesis entitled *War and Recreation* noted:

> The idea that war is a game persists even today, in part because war is an outlet for man's inherent aggressive tendencies. In the same way a sufficiently violent game can also serve as an outlet for aggression. If a country or society has no such games (as substitute for war) the outlet of its tensions, it must be forded to go to war or to be destroyed by its own pressures. Primitive societies had wars that were more like games, during peace they had games that were more like war. The interesting dichotomy that exists here is that violent games tend to breed more violence as well as its acceptance by the general population, yet a point may be made about human nature when general violence by the population is the only possible release.

War is a reality for many youth on the streets of our cities. Youth today play by their own rules. The war in our streets is evidence of this. Every 100 hours more youth die in the street in the U.S. than were killed in the Persian Gulf. Drugs, guns and death are a way of life in many communities in the U.S. Youth today expect to die young. It's a part of their culture.

Terrorism also exists on the streets of American cities. Old people fear attack from the youth gangs. The young cannot play on the streets for fear of drive-by shootings or kidnapping. The "bogey man" is no longer a fictional person but a real human being who threatens the lives of children daily. Children are kidnapped, raped and abused daily by parents and by strange people who consider their activity a form of leisure.

Technology

Social issues have not changed much in the last 20 or 30 years. Inflation, crime, war, energy, the environment and peace relations are but a few of the issues that will persist into the 21st century. Yet the issues have been compounded by the changing values and unprecedented challenges of new valued brought on by new technology that has challenged the moral fabric of this country. The issues of euthanasia, genetic engineering and even male pregnancy will challenge the best ethical philosophers. Our role is to determine how leisure lifestyles will be affected by these phenomenon. Interestingly, airlines and movie theatres widening their seats because people's posteriors are getting larger. Secretaries are gaining

more weight on the job because they no longer have to get up from their desks to access files, they simply access files from their computer. Even our youth have suffered from technology. They are among the most physically unfit of the developed countries.

Criminal Justice System

The prisons contain hundreds of thousands of individuals who lack any sense of recreation alternatives. Ethnic minorities for years have not had the recreation alternatives that mainstream American had. Today there are more black males in prison between the ages of 19 and 29 than in our colleges. Most of these individuals enter the prison system with limited knowledge and awareness of the recreation alternatives available to them in the community. A recent newspaper report indicated that a warden in an Indiana town could predict the number of prison cells needed in ten years based on the number of second graders currently attending school in that town. No attention was given to the recreational opportunities available to those second graders. Many inmates are incarcerated because they lack recreational alternatives. Our schools have done little to address the problem of free time in their curriculums. The results are choices that are antisocial.

Employment

Little is known about the leisure attitudes of the unemployed. Tentative evidence suggests that unemployed people tend to reduce the time spent on active, out of the home and social activities and increase their passive, solitary and home based pursuits.

Studies over the last decade have begun to document a link between rising joblessness and various forms of sickness and violence. In areas hit hard by the recession, alcoholism, child abuse, wife beating, suicide and mental illness are reported to be increasing. Many of these behaviors can be viewed as leisure activities.

The most widely circulated work on the relationship between employment, sickness and violence (enforced leisure) comes from Dr. M. Harvey Brenner, a sociologist at John Hopkins University. He reported in 1976 that for each one percentage point rise in unemployment, there would

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occur 4.1 percent more suicides over a six year period, 2.3 percent more admissions to mental hospitals for women, 4.3 percent more for men, 5.7 percent more murders, and 1.9 percent more deaths from heart disease, cirrhosis of the liver and stress-related disorders.

Entertainment

The entertainment industry has not shown much discretion to its young audience in terms of nutrition, cigarette smoking, (hip cartoons targeting young blacks) and exercise (couch potato). A member of Congress is currently drafting legislation to curtail the food and drink advertising that bombard Saturday morning television, specifically during the time when cartoons represent 70 percent of the shows aired.

It is no secret that our youth are not physically fit. Couch potato is an apt description. The reasons given for youth sitting at home, are in part, because of high crime in the streets, and the mothers' fear of kidnappers, muggers and rapists abducting their children.

Sixty percent of the audience for American horror movies are black and Hispanic teenagers. Fairfield Research, which conducts nationwide marketing studies on home videos reported:

> Black Hispanic teenagers who experienced violence in their homes and in drug warfare zones that pass as neighborhoods are the people who get the biggest thrill out of horror. Horror films are the cinemas of the disenfranchised.

Youth watch an average of seven hours of TV everyday. There are studies indicating that up to about 10 hours of TV viewing a week correlates with improved school achievement, while more viewing time correlates with lower achievement. The rate of violent acts during prime time has remained stable between five and six an hour. There were 5.9 violent acts and hour in prime time 1967 compared to 6.2 in 1988. In prime time, 70 percent of network programs use violence. During children's hours, 90 percent of the programs are violent.

During the past three years more than 25 violent acts an hour were committed during daytime children's programming. The trend is more

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toward cartoon violence. The rate for weekend daytime children's programs was 18.6 violent acts an hour before 19480 and 26.4 violent acts an hour after 1980. According to the Neilson index, American children see an average of 18,000 television murders before graduating from high school, children ages 2 to 11 watch 27.3 hours of television a week.

Family

In the past, schools and churches played a key role in fostering moral development. Now with religious influence in decline and schools wavering over the way to teach values, parents are pretty much on their own. Many of today's parents were raised in the 60's, the age of permissiveness. Their children were born in the age of affluence, the 80's when materialism was rampant. Lickona, a Professor of Education at State University of Cortland New York, states that:

> The adolescents most likely to follow their consciences rather than give into peer pressure are those who few up in authoritative homes, where rules are firm but clearly explained and justified - as opposed to authoritarian homes (where rules are laid down without explanation) or "permissive homes".

The adage that families who play together stay together, if true, would still be met with the challenge of parents who simply would not have time to play. Parents spend roughly 17 hours of interaction per week with their children, 15 minutes of quality time per day, four minutes of quality time with their spouses and 30 seconds of quality time with their children.

Moral development can be initiated in the home by providing structure and enforceable rules. It can also be enhanced by recreation professionals. A necessary starting point in relating moral development to recreation is adherence to rules and games and sports. Within the context of the leisure system, children first learn social and conventional behaviors, e.g. behaviors which conform to prescribed social norms and are intended to maintain social organization. Moral behavior involves a more complex set of responses including the welfare of others, right and wrong etc.

By the time today's children are seven or eight, they have been through more than the previous generation's children went through in their lifetime. Single parent dating has caused additional problems for youth. With the rise in the rate of divorce and single parents, children a being exposed to a new phenomenon - that of seeing their parents as sexual beings who date and have different romantic partners. The result is a growing sexual precociousness among young children.

There are fewer tomboys. Childhood is getting shorter and there are fewer outlets for children. Children are growing more sedentary; fantasy play may be their only creative outlet (the mind is the cheapest playground).

Religion

The churches have long been a force in the development of ethics and morality, but recent times have shown a decline in the influence of the church. As a result youth have sought other avenues, for example, the occult, satanism, high risk activities, obsessed runners, drugs, death as a leisure pursuit, and autoerotic asphyxiation.

Approaches

How we define the problem determines the approach. We must accept social responsibility and recognize that today's youth are different from any youth in the history of this country. Eric Hofer stated:

> In a time of drastic change, it is the learners who inherit the future. The learned find themselves equipped to live in a world that no longer exists.

The pace of change is occurring much more rapidly today. Obsolescence and change are the only constraints in today's society. The pace of change has increased from thousands of years to milliseconds. The horse was domesticated around 2500 B.C. but the stirrup was not invented until A.D. 500, three thousand years later. Similarly, mail which was once carried by Pony Express may have taken months on horseback to cross the country; today the FAX machine does it in a matter of seconds anywhere in the world. In the past, change took place occasionally and irregularly, in a

few activities or in a few locations. In the earlier centuries a person would usually count on ending his life in the same environment of institution, practices and values in which he began.

The following are some suggestions for recreation professionals:

1. Recognize the responsibility to address the negative aspects of leisure.
2. Recognize the urgency of attending to the at-risk youth problem now.
3. Focus on the role of leisure in society.
4. Examine soft curriculums that only address general recreation programs, and modify them to address the issues of homelessness, crime, at-risk youth etc.
5. Examine leisure education courses and redesign them to address today's problems.
6. Promote leisure lifestyle options consistent with society demands.
7. Avoid obsolescence.
8. Include the under represented in determining new leisure needs.
9. Stop focusing on symptoms and concentrate on problems.
10. Accept our responsibility in the at-risk youth problem.
11. Recognize that prisons are not the answer
12. Re-establish the role of family in our programs.
13. Take a proactive stance against the government.
14. Speak out against advertising that uses Rap and other forms of entertainment to sell alcohol, cigarettes and other harmful consumer products.
15. Address the social leisure impact of technology, the criminal justice system, employment and education.

As recreation professionals, we must recognize our role in these social issues. Too many children today are not experiencing that golden period of freedom before the tensions of the adult world seize them. This is born out of the pretend games that children play these days - games that reflect all of society's ills and concerns. Many experts say that childhood is dead. It was killed by a number of assailants - by a society that did not protect and cherish its youngest members; by a media that hastened the end of the ages of innocence; by a culture that no longer celebrated the joyous rituals of childhood. Although childhood died, the children survived.

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